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ABSTRACT

Fourth graders in the Meroby School, Mexico, Maine, produce a weekly news program that is transmitted to all classrooms via closed circuit television. The classroom teacher is in charge of day-to-day preparation, working on the writing and the necessary skills with students. Teachers and students use their creativity to come up with new programming ideas. At this school, the gifted/talented teacher works with the classroom teacher on the programs. Students spend about three hours preparing the half-hour program. The shows take many forms--contemporary news, theme shows, and other special programs developed by students. The program started with one camera, a table and chairs, and a small room. It has grown substantially over the years. Students involved in the project sometimes show unexpected talents. Gifted second graders up to high school students can adapt the basic ideas of the Broadcast News project. Students' writing and communication skills improve as they write and perform for real audiences. Social studies, science, music, art, physical education, and mathematics can all become part of the shows. People resources are important. Commitment from the classroom teacher is essential. Broadcast News is a focal point that can encompass many areas of the curriculum at once. (RS)

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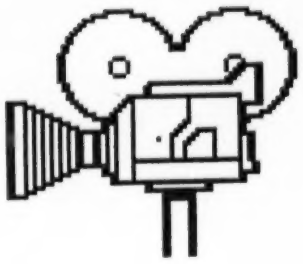
Broadcast News:

An Interdisciplinary Project



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Broadcast News

General Description

Who: Fourth graders in our school produce a weekly news program. We have three fourth grades, and they each produce nine programs. Students usually take the same reporter's job for several weeks before changing. Reporters who focus on school activities involve students from other classes in the school who have special projects or things to show. High school students and the superintendent are examples of other people who have shared an activity or been interviewed. Even pets from home have shared the spotlight.

The classroom teacher is the important person in charge of the day-to-day preparation. S/he works on the writing and the necessary skills with students. Teacher and students use their creativity to come up with new programming ideas. In our project rehearsals and the show are directed by the classroom teacher with the teacher of g/t.

The teacher of gifted/talented introduces the project with students, and works with the classroom teacher at set times of the week. She also makes arrangements for a possible field trip to a TV station, and for broadcast on the community access channel.

Equipment is handled by the media specialist. She sees that everything is working properly, and handles the camera. Camera work could be handled by an older student, but since we broadcast to the community, we like to have a steady hand.

Our special education teacher is usually the person to use our second camera, which focuses on the script for each reporter. That picture is sent to a TV which acts as a prompter. The TV is set up next to the main camera.

We can't forget our principal, since he provides us with the support and space we need.

What: The show we produce can take many forms. It can focus on contemporary news- what's going on in the world, nation, state, town, school and classroom. A trip to

the Norlands inspired a show that "aired" in 1850, with period costumes and news, such as tools used in the kitchen and barn. A theme studied in the classroom, such as Japan, can provide the framework that informs the whole school about a particular topic. Another special program was produced by four second grade girls who wrote a show that explained what happened in their classroom. The girls, whose enthusiasm was contagious, involved every student in their classroom.

When: Monday morning the classroom teacher and teacher of g/t work with the students on their writing. The writing may be finished in class or as homework. At noon on Tuesday the writing needs to be completed, as a volunteer types the script in big print. Students rehearse on Wednesday, and take home a copy of their script to practice that evening. As advertised on the intercom, the show, MBN (Meroby Broadcast News) starts at 8:05 Alive!, giving classroom teachers 15 minutes to complete their early morning procedure. Later the tape is taken to the community access channel for a 7 PM show time.

Where: We're lucky to have an extra room to use for a studio. The wall was even painted a medium blue to serve as a background. We first started however, in a very small classroom. That worked too!

How: The show started with one camera, a table and chairs, and a small room. With a larger room, we were able to add more equipment. The weather person may use a computer, or an overhead projecting onto a screen. A movable screen is used to post all the scripts in order. The second camera and TV is used to make a teleprompter. If the TV is as close as possible to the camera, it will not be obvious that reporters are reading. A second TV is connected on the side wall to the closed circuit system, so we can keep track of what our audience is seeing. A second movable screen is sometimes used to post visual aids for a report. A table with students

moving in and out of chairs has been replaced with a cabinet that students stand behind. Movement seems to be a little smoother that way. Very young students stand next to the cabinet. When we have a number of things to display, such as student-made boats for a "Boat Float", we add a table to the side or in front of the cabinet. A piano in the room has been used to provide beginning and ending music, but usually a tape recorder plays our theme, although the music may be changed to go with the theme of the broadcast. At times we use a globe to spin as our theme music is on. We also focus on a sign in the beginning that identifies our school and program name, and one at the end that gives credit to the students and teachers involved.

Students are seated in chairs behind the camera in the order they appear. Students from other classes sit in a row behind them, also in order of appearance. This helps tremendously with organization for the director.

Why: Why do we do this program? It's an opportunity for students to have a real life product. They know other students, their family and community will see this product. It serves the community by keeping them informed of what is happening in our school.

Another reason is that students can integrate all the language arts skills, and on one show include all the subjects that are studied in school. Students can use these skills to the level that each one is able.

A compelling reason that evolved with the show, is that unexpected talents develop or are shown for the first time. A student in a special reading program can write with a strong voice and show style and delivery in even being the anchor! A student in special education may have difficulty reading, but is able to memorize or tell his report in a way that receives complements. And another student can come up with an extremely creative idea, and do a complex report. A very quiet, shy student can develop during the nine week period into a very competent reporter with a loud voice and an easy manner. What fun to watch!

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Adaptations: What sounds complicated, can be made much more simple. We started simple, and it just grew. One classroom teacher with her whole class can start with just one program to end a unit of study. A special education teacher can produce a show with just a handful of students, as can a teacher of gifted/talented. A music or art teacher can produce a show using different classes to illustrate what was learned during the year.

Although Broadcast News is a fourth grade project for us, this teacher did broadcasting with a variety of ages, going from gifted second graders to high school students.

A show can concentrate on one topic a class studied, or portray the variety of subjects studied during the year. The show can inform students in a school what is happening in the world around them through a class's study of current events, or concentrate on what is happening within the school. The ideas are limited only by the creativity of the students and teacher.

Equipment can be minimal. The basic equipment needed is a camcorder, VCR and TV. In lieu of a second camcorder for a teleprompter, scripts can be written in large print and just posted (even on a music stand) next to the camera. Or the student can hold the script, or even memorize it. Students could also learn how to give a talk just prompted by cue words. You'll find that other equipment will be added as the need arises. Good lighting is important. Your art teacher may have some lights that could be used.

Although we are lucky to have a closed-circuit TV system in our school, a tape could circulate to other classes, so they can watch it at their convenience. A community access channel is certainly not necessary, but it's a good public relations effort if you have it. In any case, parents may wish to borrow the tape, and it can circulate like a library book.

Students spend approximately three hours preparing and producing a half hour program each week. This obviously can change, depending on how often you produce a program and its length. You can see a definite improvement of skills in a nine week period.

Goals

Over-all: These goals were mentioned in the WHY section above. Broadcast News is a program that allows a number of goals to be met, and that's what makes it worthwhile, although we can't forget the student's enthusiasm for the project.

Subject Goals:

Writing- This is an opportunity to develop many of the writing goals needed for the MEA's. Development of a topic with rich details make a report much more interesting. Learning to write for a specific audience is important too. We have to balance the issues of whether a child in kindergarten should know versus whether they'd be interested. Learning to find the main idea of a newspaper article is a challenging skill for most 4th graders. A worksheet that provides an outline of the who, what... with space for details is often helpful. Editing skills may be developed, as well as working with deadlines.

Interviewing is a skill that needs to be taught. Two primary aspects that are needed are: learning how to introduce yourself and your project, and asking open-ended questions. Also good skills for general conversation.

Oral Reading/Speaking- Learning to read so it sounds like talking- a challenge for fourth graders. Speaking up so everyone can hear, accenting enunciation, using facial expressions, developing an easy and animated delivery, learning to keep going and even ad-libbing when things go wrong: all are important goals for a good production. Many adults would love to have these skills, and they're easier to learn when you're ten.

Social Studies- Here is a reason to read the newspaper, to keep informed and inform others of what is going on in the world. Maps can be used; projects can be

shared. Topics studied can provide the whole theme of a show, such as a show with all the early explorers explaining their ambitions and voyages.

Surveys became a popular report with students, and was a way to include other classes. Skills and vocabulary of surveying need to be taught.

Science- Having to explain a science experiment usually means the students better understands the concept. An experiment may go with the science topic studied in class, or allow an interested student to explore various topics on his/her own. Students also seem to be very interested in pets. They may bring in their own, or ask a student from another class to bring in their pet. The owner can be interviewed.

Weather forecasting is another popular report. It helps if the class studies weather, so reporters are familiar with terms. Students need to be flexible, and change their report at the last minute if the weather doesn't support their report.

Music- Here's an opportunity for the school chorus or band to perform in another medium, or to advertise their upcoming performance. Classes or individuals may perform music either as part of a report, or as music that begins and ends a program. Great way to utilize talent. Reports may be given on what is learned in music class, a certain composer, or certain types of music. "The Star Spangled Banner" could be sung as the opening for a school day.

Art- Our school has a number of large art prints that students may borrow from the library, or that the art teacher uses in instruction. Critiquing a famous painting on the news show is another way students may become familiar, or be reminded of an artist and painting. Sometimes student art work is shown, and reporters explain what they like best about the work. Techniques of painting, or different craft activities may also be shown.

Physical Education- Sports reporting is a must for fourth graders. The difficult part is getting the knowledgeable sports enthusiast to report mainly on kid's teams (Remember your audience!). Fifth graders did a memorable guest program in May on just baseball. They

showed uniforms, performed the famous skit "Who's on First", and explained equipment and rules. It was a hit with all grade levels.

What happens in phys. ed. class is also news, and can be used as a regular report.

Math- Yes, math too can become a part of the show. A math reporter can demonstrate interesting math concepts that might not be used in the regular classroom. Measurement as part of a craft project, or used in reporting on a survey, can show integration of subjects.

Math is also involved in figuring out how long the show is: crucial if you have a half hour time slot on the access channel.

Others- There are topics that aren't covered in school. One that became popular with one class was fashion. They invited students from various classes to come in and model new spring clothes, or different types of sneakers. Can you teach how to model?

Another topic we covered was baseball card collecting, and your students will probably find other topics that are interesting to them.

Resources

Equipment is discussed in in the HOW section above. You can do it with minimal equipment.

People resources are important. Commitment from the classroom teacher is essential. The support of the principal can be very helpful, and will probably be easier to obtain if the program is available to the community. Other teachers can be enlisted to help. Teachers of special education or gifted/talented are helpful in working with students on writing and presenting skills. A teacher of English as a Second Language may give assistance if his/her student is in your class. The speech therapist may work with the whole class in enunciating and projecting. Art, music and phys. ed. teachers may assist with news in their area. The media specialist can help with equipment, camera work and selection of books for a book critic. Volunteers may help with

any aspect, but are wonderful at typing up the scripts after they are edited. A good reason for handwriting to be neat!

Students and teachers may find books on making movies helpful. Most libraries have something available, and books can be put on the list for the next order. However, just doing it is more helpful than reading about it. Watching the show with the students and critiquing it together, can help the show improve.

With a small amount of money, the best investment would probably be to buy good tapes and a set of lights.

Conclusion

Broadcast News is a focal point that can encompass many areas of your curriculum at once. Critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, long range planning and quick thinking all merge in one project. And that doesn't even include the fun, enthusiasm, and pride from a job well done!

Using many student and teacher resources is a way of pulling the school together in one project. It's also a way of finding and using talent at all grade levels.

Start small, and you'll grow with the need and your feeling of competence. Good luck, and feel free to call if you need help.